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From Space to Place; Non-hierarchical Collaborative Strategies of Teaching and Learning in the Crawford College of Art and Design.

Art practice is a complex process, and successful induction into the forms of teaching and learning practiced in the studio is critical to a student's progress through art college.

In a series of action research projects, conducted over the last five years with student volunteers in the Crawford College of Art and Design, we have explored phenomenological, collaborative approaches to teaching and learning, space and place, that encourage students to be active agents in their education and co-creators of their own learning environment.

Using non-hierarchical approaches, and performative methods derived from current art practice, delivery on shared modules in the Year 1 Fine Art and Contemporary Applied Art courses has been aligned closely with the practices of contemporary art.

We will discuss two experiments in methodology that we examined during this research, 'A Contextual Chair' and 'Place and Performativity', that focused students and teachers on participation in the community of practice that is the art studio. A central objective of these experiments was to explore the phenomenology of identity and place in the student's experience of the transition to art college.



Fig.1 A Contextual Chair.

‘A Contextual Chair’ was introduced as an experimental activity as part of Art and Context module in Year 1. The aim was to question our accepted and internalised social norms and structures, so that we can creatively reinvent our ways of behaving and thinking. It was devised as a way for students as a team, to question the relationship of object to context, how objects exist in space and what the context of the space does to the object.



Fig. 2 Place and Performativity.

This exercise was a bridge to the ‘Place and Performativity’ experimental workshop in the Glucksman Gallery, which brought teachers and students together in an experiment that took a phenomenological approach to exploring body in space.

The experience of this novel form of enquiry was illuminating for the participants. The familiar had been refreshed and we found ourselves looking at our response to environment and context as a new way of generating knowledge.

Afterwards, at the discussion participants spoke of feeling restrained at first by the silence of the space, acknowledging a heightened awareness of how they were expected to behave there. Then, through their interactions with the space, they found that they were exploiting and even subverting its meaning, qualities, function and associations.

The value of the embodied knowledge acquired through these approaches is not confined to teaching and learning within the field of art but is transferable to any educational domain and any discipline which seeks to enable creative and critical thinking in its practitioners.

Near the end of his last book *Chaosmosis* (1993) Felix Guattari asks:

How do you bring a classroom to life as if it were a work of art?